

Jeanette Bailey-Spence

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Appropriations - DDS

Thank you to the co-chairs, Senator Osten, Senator Formica, and Representative Walker, and esteemed members of the Appropriations Committee. I am testifying today to urge the committee to reject the cuts that the Governor has proposed to DDS.

My name is Jeanette Bailey-Spence, and I am a group home worker at Oak Hill and Journey Found. I am also a member of SEIU 1199.

The Governor is trying to balance the budget by laying off state workers and underpaying private sector workers. This balances the budget on the backs of middle class workers and people with disabilities.

I've worked as a group home and day program worker in the private sector for 29 years. I love the work that I do, and the participants I take care of.

However, even without further cuts, our services are threatened. At the day program where I work, Oak Hill is planning to cut about half of the slots, due to insufficient funding. This is heartbreaking for the staff who have worked there for years, and for our participants, who have received stable care here for years. As you consider the Governor's proposed cuts, I ask you to consider how the participants, their families, and their caretakers will feel as their beloved day programs are closed.

Furthermore, the wages we receive are too low. It's unacceptable that after 29 years in this industry, I still have to work two jobs to make ends meet. Health care workers shouldn't have to work 60, 70, 80 hours or more a week just to pay the bills. It's even worse for my younger co-workers, who are just entering this industry and are suffering from hiring rates that are lower than they were in the past.

If the budget for DDS is cut further, we as workers will suffer, but the people who will be hurt the most are the people who receive services. We cannot go another year with more cuts. I'm here today to tell DDS that we need full funding for all of the services we provide. Whether in the public or private sector, all of our residents deserve to live in homes that are adequately funded and staffed. And, all of us who do this work deserve to be paid a living wage.

I ask you to work with us to help us continue to provide the care our residents deserve, and to improve the quality of our jobs. Instead of further cuts to DDS, we need more funding. I urge you to reject the cuts requested in the Governor's budget and work with us to find a way to help us provide the best care to our families.